

Confirmation chapter 8

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Summary: Morgan faces some disturbing and strange hours on his own, beeing lost from his team..

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The blearing sound echoed between the trees at a deafening level, and everybody turned round to look up towards the pod-ridge. "I think that's your perimeter alarm?" Alonzo started, but Morgan and Danziger was already in the L.T.V. turning it round. He threw himself in the back, alongside Danziger, just as they took off. Danziger found his gear among the penal-colonists stash, and called up Baines, telling them to follow. He really didn't have to. They were already on their way. Soon the vehicle skidded to a holt just below the pod, and they all scurried up the steep slope, witch was more difficult this time, because they had to cower their ears. Morgan emerged first at the front of the pod, seeing his fellow crew-mates lying on the ground, clutching their ears in agony. He pressed the remote, and the electric blue light of the perimeter dissolved, and the marrow-chilling sound with it. "He really did it!" Morgan goped incredulously at his brother, who were clearly experiencing great pain from the severe burns and deep gashes from the lasers of the defense. "I knew you'd probably wake up an idiot, but that stupid?!" He dragged the whining man over to a tree, propping him up against it. "Stop sniveling. You'll be fine in a minute." Julia hesitantly came over to them, scanning Jason. A gasp eluded her, and she looked more scared than confused. "A brand new brain to go." Morgan murred, "and he has to go and fry it right a way." Danziger came over to Julia, supporting her as she stumbled backwards. He cast a glance at her medi-glove. Her readings showed that Jason was dead, and had been so for hours. Danziger grabbed Morgan by his shirtfront, slamming him against the tree. "How the devil can you do that?" He sounded near panicy, fearing what he couldn't comprehend. "How should I know?" Morgan whined in his usual way. "We just seem to do, that's all. Most of this is as new to me as it is to you." He straightened out his crumpled shirt. "Just keep an eye on the 'corpse'. He's got no brains to think with yet. He'll have to learn everything over again." "For someone who knows nothing, you seem to

know a lot.Â» Danziger snarled, grabbing for Morgan again. Â«Stop it!Â» Bess threw herself in between them, pushing Danziger away. Â«Leave him be! It's not his fault!Â» Danziger backed off, but kept scowling at Morgan. Â«We better start working if we want something done before sundown.Â» Walman took charge, setting his crew-mates working, to ease up on the fear that had crept in on most of them seeing the dead man coming to life: Â«Get someone up on that sun-tarp to remove the water.Â» Morgan pressed the code of the Digi-lock, opened the door, and fished out his ladder. Â«There's a lightswitch...Â» He turned on the lights. Â«OK.Â» Danziger breathed. Â«Walman, you help me unload the parts to the vehicles. Morgan, you sit right here on these crates, where I can keep an eye on you, and tack things off on the list as we unload them. Got it?! The rest of you, carry the parts down to Morgan's L.T.V. and drive them down to the brook-ridge. Load them over, and take them to camp. Half of you stay behind down there, and start assembling them. And bring the sand-buggy back up here as soon as you've done.Â» Everybody took their places without a word, starting to work right away. - - - - - - - - Danziger came in to the mess-tent, wet and covered with mud. Â«If only this darn rain would ease up!Â» He muttered. Â«We've lost two days already.Â» Yale looked up from teaching the children, and smiled reassuringly. Â«We'll find him.Â» He gave the kids some problems to solve on their own, and came over to the shivering mechanic. Â«We've searched the whole forest west of the brook so far, but no trace.Â» Danziger sighed, sipping his tea. Â«He could be anywhere.Â» Yale looked thoughtful. Â«What's on the east side?Â» Â«Woods, like on this side, narrowing into a dry high-ground as the brook turns ninety degrees right west some three - four miles up of here.Â» He studied the old man, who sat down at the table, quickly sketching a rough map. Â«What's beyond here?Â» Yale pointed at the bend of the brook. Â«A sandy basin. Looks like something's knocked out a large piece of the ridge quite recently. Loose sands. Dangerous to cross in this weather. Why? You think he's out there somewhere?Â» Danziger looked at the map, placing the basin on it. Â«It figures, don't it.Â» He grinned tired. Â«It's just what he would do, right?Â» He tapped a code on his gear. Â«Alonzo? Where are you now? Take a quick peek over the basin while you're up there, OK? No, don't go in, just scan the place, OK. Call in if you find something.Â» He signed off, and got up with a tired grimace. Â«You could do with some rest, John.Â» Yale said concerned. Â«You've been on your feet for more than two days.Â» Danziger opened the door, looking out on the rain. Â«It doesn't matter. I'll get no rest anyway until we find him... One way or another. We just can't let the rain stop us.Â» He stepped out into the wet afternoon, heading up along the riverside. Halfways up to the ridge, Alonzo called in. Â«Yeah, Solace, whaddyou got?Â» Danziger stopped a brief moment to focus on the caller. Â«We found a life-pod! It's halfways buried in the sand on the other side of the basin. Can't see the door. To soggy to get across.Â» Danziger was already on his way. Â«Stay where you are 'till I get there.Â»

They scanned the hillside around the pod. Â«Looks like the crash of that pod knocked loose the ground when it landed.Â» Walman said, handing his Jumper to Danziger. Â«Whole side of that ridge has slid out. And even more on the other side, it seems.Â» Â«If it wasn't for that mud-slide you can see the trace of just beyond the pod, we would've missed it.Â» Danziger handed the Jumper back to Walman: Â«That just happened?Â» The three men in-front of him nodded. Â«Rain's washing out the ground underneath those trees up there. Looks like the whole place is slidin' out.Â» Walman concluded. Â«The hillside is full of burrows.Â» Alonzo explained. Â«Huh?Â» Baines

looked to Danziger who shrugged. Â«Rabbits. They must have undermined the whole ridge. That's why it slid out when the pod hit it... I guess.Â» Alonzo added. Â«Rabbits. Right.Â» Baines mumbled, still looking to Danziger for answers. Â«Little furry things, likes to dig holes in the ground. You can eat them.Â» Danziger whispered quickly. Â«Oh... OK.Â» As they stood pondering what to do next, the clouds broke up, and the rain was gone as suddenly as it had come. Soon, the sun was baking down from the sky again, rapidly drying up the water from the sand, hardening the surface. Â«'nother couples of hours of sun, and we can get over there, right?Â» Walman wandered restlessly up and down on the riverbank, until Danziger got enough of it, and slammed him down on the passenger seat of the L.T.V. Â«Sit down, dammit!Â» He murred. Â«You're gettin' on my nerves!Â»

Â«OK, what's the readouts. Can we go yet?Â» Danziger snatched the instrument from Baines before he could answer, and stared at the display as if he could change the readout with his will. Â«Yeah, we can go.Â» Baines confirmed, and the band started moving carefully down the steep. The other search-teams had joined them, and they all set out to search their allotted areas. Â«Be careful up there. That mud-slide just happened.Â» Danziger warned as Baines led team two off in the direction of it, to check what had caused it. Alonzo, Walman and Danziger made their way towards the life-pod, with the third team waiting behind them on the brook-ridge, aiming their Mag-Pro's towards the pod, just in case. Â«It's locked, from the outside.Â» Alonzo stated, pressing a over-ride code on the Digi-lock. The door opened, and Danziger poked his head carefully into it. Â«All clear.Â» He breathed, and opened the door wide. Â«Someone's been living here. Two, three persons. There's dried meat and herbs hanging from the roof, cloths and nic-nac's littered all over the place.Â» He poked into a pile of clothing with the mussle of his Mag-Pro. Â«Yeah, Pen's.Â» He didn't want to think what had happened to the people who came down in the pod. Â«The meat's fresh. They can't have been gone to long.Â» Alonzo said behind him. Â«Maybe they got caught out in the rain.Â» Danziger quickly warned the other two teams. Â«OK, we'll go round the other side. Keep your eyes open. Team three, advance to the life-pod with the L.T.V.Â» He signed of, and started looking for a safe way to get to the top of the muddy, crumbling hillside behind the life-pod. They had only just started climbing, when Baines called in. Â«We found someone. In the mud-slide. Pretty messed up.Â» Danziger bit his underlip, knowing Bess was listening in, as well as all the others. Â«Get Julia over there, team three.Â» He said, avoiding the question. Â«Don't think this guy needs a doc. anymore, Danz.Â» Baines said quietly. Â«He's in a real bad shape.Â» Danziger cursed underneath his breath at the mans stupidity. Â«Well, get her over there anyway, got that?!Â» He barked, and broke connection. They struggled on in silence, making slow progress up the soggy hillside. Suddenly Danziger stopped. What was that? Something red in-between the trees. Metallic. He hurried on, hoping against all hopes... Â«It's a supply-pod!Â» The three men soon stood in-front of it, goping. Â«Is it intact?Â» Alonzo made his stumbling way towards it. Â«It's intact!Â» He shouted, grinning. Walman started to run, but caught sight of Danziger who moved cautiously away from it, with his Mag-Pro ready. Talking to his teamleaders on the gear, he knelt down beside a figure laying face down in the mud. Â«Dead. Side-arm. Close shot. Base of the neck.Â» He stood up warily, scanning the surroundings. Another body lay halfways in-under a bush. Â«Right between the eyes. Same type of weapon. Both been dead for at least two days.Â» He motioned for Walman to cower him as he moved around the pod, one careful step at the time. Alonzo squatted down behind

the tree he stood next to, as he waited for his team-mates to secure the area. Danziger gave all clear, and they gathered in-front of the pod-door. "I guess we know what happened to our three friends from the pod?" Alonzo mumbled. "If that guy in the mud-slide had been Morgan, they'd let us know by now, right?" Team two came out of the small forest behind them, making big eyes at team one's find. "There's two more dead guys over there. Suit up and have them taken away before we start working on breaking the code on this." Walman ordered. Danziger was already studying the Digi-lock at a distance. "Someone's tried to force it open with a rock." He pointed to the small dents and scratches around it. He stepped closer. "I wonder... Bess, what's your birthday?" He asked, getting the answer over the gear. "It's a longshot, but anyway..." He mumbled, pressing the code. The Digi-lock made a bleep, and the door opened. "Well I'll be..." Danziger slowly widened the opening of the door, silently entering the darkness inside, with Walman following on his heels. Suddenly there came a crash, and a shower of swearwords and yacching, and someone turned on a torch, flashing it about. Then Danziger came backing out like a rocket, yelling panic-stricken, trying to brush something dark and sticky off himself. Julia caught him in the flight, snapped a sedi-derm at his neck, and hurried into the pod on Walman's request. "Oh, my God! Morgan?!" She threw herself down on her knees next to the unconscious man lying curled up in a pool of his own blood. "Quickly, let me get some light here!" She ordered, scanning Morgan's lifeless form. "He's still alive, but just barely." She told Walman, who shakily held his torch up. "Danziger tripped over something. Fell right into it. The blood." He said, trying not to panic himself. Julia worked frantically, trying to find the source to Morgan's blood-loss: "Several knife wounds to his upper body. One stab; entrance-wound in the stomach, punctured left lung, hole in his heart-sack. Status, critical." Outside, the rest of team three arrived to find Danziger hanging round the corner of the pod, covered in blood and throwing up. Bess hurried over. "You all-right?" She asked worried, having him sit down on a toppled tree-trunk, helping him to get off his blood-soaked cloths. The man was still too upset to talk, but he nodded. They could see people running in and out of the pod, someone climbing up on the roof of it, spreading out a sun-tarp, connecting it. "Maybe Julia needs some help. I'll go and..." Danziger held her back. "No. She'll manage. Stay here." He couldn't look Bess in the eyes as he spoke, knowing that she'd understand. Bess still held his blood-soaked jacket, and at the sight of it he retched. She looked down at it, not knowing whether to throw it away, or clutch it close; Danziger was soaked in blood. Morgan's blood. She sagged down next to him, palefaced, too numb to move. When the lights came on inside the pod, Walman gasped. The blankets Morgan lay curled up on was saturated with blood, and the floor in-front of him... He swallowed hard trying not to be sick. He'd seen much in his time in the army, but this... "He's a gonner." He whispered, seeing Julia bent over Morgan, stitching him up. "Shut up, Walman!" She hissed between gritted teeth, working as fast as she could. "Do something useful! Find someone his bloodtype! Quick!" "Julia, he's..." She just gave him a glare, and he knew there was no use arguing. He'd seen it before. On the battlefield. "OK." He went outside, into the warmth of the afternoon, freezing inside despite the intense heat, shaking his head. She was trying to postpone the inevitable.

Julia came out of the pod for a quick breath of fresh air, several hours later, and Bess almost ran her to the ground. "You'll have to wait a minute." She said sternly to the distressed woman, clinging to her arm. "I don't want you to see him right now. He needs rest."

Yale's looking after him, while I tend to you.Â» She promptly sat Bess down, checking her. Â«Give her a cup of something hot, with sugar in it. And make up something for Danziger as well while you're at it.Â» She ordered, and went to change her bloodied clothes. Â«What the hell happened in there?Â» Danziger moaned, shivering in his blanket. Â«It didn't happen in there. No signs of fight.Â» Walman stated. Julia agreed. Â«Somehow he made it inside, re-set the Digi-lock and curled himself up on a pile of blankets.Â» She placed her arm over Bess's shoulders. Â«He's in real bad shape. He's been cut and stabbed. Lost a critical amount of blood. I don't know if he'll manage over night.Â» Bess made a muffled cry, wanting to go to him right away. Â«Just a little longer Bess. Zero's cleaning the floor. I don't want to risk him having to fight an infection as well.Â» Julia comforted Bess, holding her back. Â«I feel like an idiot. Carrying on like that.Â» Danziger mumbled as Yale came out, leaving Julia and Bess alone in the cramped space. Â«Why? For reacting like a human? First you found two soaked corpses, then you fell face first in a friend's blood. It's understandable that you had a reaction. You've been on your feet for nearly three days without any rest. You're not perfect, John.Â» Yale smiled sadly.

Â«Julia?Â» Morgan whispered barely audible. Â«Have I slept?Â» She came over to him, checking his vital signs. Â«Yes, and you should go back to sleep, too. You shouldn't even be awake. Save your strength.Â» Bess woke with a start, sitting at his feet, right inside the door. Â«Morgan!Â» She crawled up to him, kissing his cheek. Â«Careful!Â» Julia warned Bess, as he reached for his wife. Â«Hold me.Â» He begged thin, and she lay down behind him, wrapping her arms gently around him. Â«Shhhh. Go to sleep now.Â» She shushed him, blinking back her tears. Â«You'll feel better in the morning, love.Â» He moaned low for an answer, fading off again.

Morgan woke early the next morning, feeling rested after a good night's sleep. He dressed quickly, and headed for the mess-tent, thirsty for a cup of Bess's coffee. He felt so good. As good as he'd never been before. Healthy and strong. Ready to work. He drew a deep breath. The forest smelled so good after the rain. Fresh. The others were up already, he could hear them talking and laughing inside as he came close to the tent. Danziger and Yale sat by the heating-device, talking intently. Â«You saw the wounds, Yale! He should have died! Â» Danziger pressed. Â«I say he's got the Devil in him!Â» Bess snapped, as she helped serve the coffee with their breakfast. The door opened, and Morgan stepped inside, smiling cheerfully. The room fell silent as he moved towards his friends. Â«Eating with us, are you?!Â» Walman said out loud. Â«What's the matter, Walman?Â» Morgan asked confused, stopping in the middle of the floor. Â«You! Talking and breathing! The last night all but a corpse! How d'you manage that, Morgan Martin?!Â» Walman talked loud. Too loud, as if he was afraid of something. Morgan looked at them, shocked. Â«Would you rather I was dead?Â» Bess stepped up to him, reaching out a hesitant hand, as if to touch him: Â«It's not natural...Â» Then she pulled her hand away, and quickly backed away from him with a fanatic look in her eyes: Â«He's in league with Lucifer!Â» She hissed. Â«Don't say that, Bess!Â» Yale warned, nervous that she'd call the evil spirit down on them, mentioning his name. Â«I'll say it!Â» Danziger rose from his seat: Â«You've got the devil in you!Â» Morgan looked confused and angry at Danziger. Â«I've been on your crew for more than two years!Â» Â«Morgan Martin was my crew-man! I don't know who you are!Â» Danziger avoided looking him in the eyes, lest the demons that had taken place in Morgan would take him too. Morgan walked round the table and sat

down across from Yale. He looked at the old scholar, pleadingly. Â«Yale?!Â» Â«You better go, Morgan.Â» He said, looking away, afraid and unable to help. Â«I'm not going anywhere!Â» Morgan stated angrily. A sharp pain at his neck, and he faded away into darkness.

Julia checked Morgan's pulse. Â«He's slipping in and out of consciousness. It's a miracle that he's survived so far.Â» She whispered to Danziger as he came in to check on him, for the N'th time that night. Â«He's hallucinating. He mumbled something about not going anywhere. I gave him a numb-drug to make shure he don't try getting up.Â» Danziger nodded. He looked strained. Even if the room now was as clean as you could get a supply-pod with all it's wares still in it, he couldn't get the sight out of his mind. All that blood. Morgan's blood. He closed his eyes, taking a deep breath. Â«Phobias is something that need to be worked on.Â» Julia said calmly. Â«You don't overcome them by avoiding what you fear.Â» He nodded. Â«Yeah, I know; 'Face your fears...' But you need someone to help you overcome them.Â» She smiled. Â«You're doing fine just knowing that.Â» Â«When we first crashed, Morgan was so afraid to leave the pod, he almost fainted.Â» Bess whispered. Â«He had never been off his home-station before in his life. Just in V.R. so, he started pretending he was stuck in a V.R. simulation, just so that he could manage to go out.Â» She hugged him gently, and he smiled faintly in his feverish doze. Â«He knows I'm here.Â» She said, wiping sweat from his forehead. Â«I don't know how he's done it, but somehow he must have managed to open a can of energy-biscuits. He's eaten half one before he fainted from the blood loss.Â» Julia fetched the can, and handed it to Danziger. Â«Here, give each a half. No more.Â» Danziger took the canister, and headed out into the fresh night air. He stopped just outside the door, looking back in. Julia was hooking up a new bag of blood to the I.V. stand. He frowned. Why didn't that blood make him feel sick? Make him back away in panic? And that time in the cave, when they found Bess and Morgan, why didn't he react like this then? He shook his head, and took the rounds to deliver biscuits to the perimeter guards first, before going back to the fire and the questions; the waiting.

When next he looked in, Yale was watching Morgan, while Julia got some long needed rest. Morgan seemed to be awake. Sort of. Danziger went over and squatted down. Â«Hey, pal. You gave us quite a run for our credits, trying to find you?Â» He grinned. Morgan moaned, trying to smile. Â«How come you've carried all the stuff back in here?Â» He breathed, coughing from the effort. Â«Hush, take it easy.Â» Danziger looked worried over at Julia. Â«Hey, I'm OK.Â» Morgan grimaced. Â«Just knocked myself up a bit when I fell down that mud-slide. Knocked my head. Dropped my Mag-Pro. You find it?Â» He grabbed Danziger's arm, staring at him with wide open eyes, glazed with fever. Â«You've got to find it!Â» He coughed again, doubling over with pain. Yale hurried to give him a pain-block, and Morgan slumped back, breathing easier. Â«Sorry. I'm so sorry... I...Â» Danziger backed out of the pod, stumbling over roots and splintered trees. Â«Careful. One patient in there is enough!Â» Walman caught him just in time, as he fell backwards over a trunk. Â«Here, let's get you to bed. You've had a long three days, Danz.Â» He guided the shaky man back to the camp and put him to bed. Â«And make shure he stays there!Â» He ordered, before he took up his night-patrol. Yale checked Morgan's vital signs and adjusted the I.V., then he placed a blanket over Bess who had finally fallen asleep too. Â«Yale?Â» Morgan croaked. Â«I'm thirsty.Â» Yale found a sponge and wet Morgan's lips.

“You have internal injuries. I can't let you drink.” He said mildly, withdrawing the sponge when Morgan tried to suck moisture from it. “This is pretty stupid, huh?” Morgan moaned. “I'm just about healed after my last encounter with a Pen. and then I go and knock the wounds up again, falling down the hillside in a mud-slide, chasing one of them.” Yale creased his forehead. “No talking. You need rest. You're not in the clear yet.” “What? I hit my head that bad? I know I was out for a while, and my chest hurts like...” Yale placed a finger over his mouth, checking his vitals again. “I said no talking. Get some sleep now. You'll feel much better in the morning.” Morgan blinked, trying to focus, then did as he was told. Soon he was sleeping restlessly. “Julia.” Yale woke the doctor gently, handing her a steaming cup of coffee and a energy biscuit. She jumped up, confused, looking about. “Shhhhh. It's OK. I just need to talk to you about something. Something important.” He led her just outside the pod. The two moons had just come up over the horizon, chasing each other across the dark, star-specked sky. “What injuries had the man who fell down the ravine with the mud-slide this morning?” He asked quietly. Julia shook her head, trying to get rid of some of her fatigue, then sipped her coffee. “Uh... Major head injury. Split his skull open. Several severe cuts and tears from the fall, broken ribs, punctured left lung. But what killed him, was a blast from a Mag-Pro. He'd been dead for a while.” She looked query at Yale. “Some of the injuries are the same that Morgan's got, more or less?” He asked. She nodded, munching her biscuit. “He just insisted, twice, that he fell down that ravine. First to Danziger, and now to me. How does he know about the mud-slide? You said he's been in there for at least two days. Since before it started to rain.” Julia nodded again. “Yeah, slowly but surely bleeding dry.” She sighed. “Did they find any weapons nearby the top of that mud-slide?” He asked, remembering Morgan's plea. Julia wrinkled her brows. “A Mag-Pro.” She stated. “It lay across the gap, as if it was torn from the man's grip when he fell. Why?” Yale smiled. “Nothing. Morgan just asked John to find it, that's all.” They went inside again. Julia yawned, and checked on Yale's notes from when she had slept. “Yale. Are these right?” She scanned through the notes on her digi-pad. “Yes. He's getting better.” He smiled. “But, so fast?” Julia scanned Morgan with her medi-glove finding the readings right. “Morgan believes he's getting better fast, so he is.” Yale stated. “I think Bess told us how he does that.” He continued before Julia could neither ask or protest. “He's in V.R. Everything is possible in V.R.”

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